

Arsenal jobs safe: O'Brien

While both the Joliet Army Ammunitions plant and the Joliet Job Corps have escaped Gramm-Rudman budget cuts for now, U.S. Rep. George O'Brien, R-Joliet, said today "eternal vigilance is necessary."

He said there is a "lot of momentum" from the Rock Island arsenal to cut back on the number of employees at the munitions plant here. Until O'Brien intervened, 130 of the 302 employees at the local facility were to have been laid off in February. While that order was stayed, he said additional funding reductions will come in September that could cause problems at the plant. When the Army announced it would abandon the plan to lay off the 130, he said it was the first time in 14 years he was able to get the Army "to back down."

While his concern primarily is about the arsenal, he feels the Job Corps could be spared. This week James Daniels, the executive director at Job Corps here, was in Washington for an evaluation of the local program.

O'Brien said the Labor Department rates Joliet's program as "one of the top." With such a rating he said if some of the 35 or 40 such programs are cut back in the Midwest, Joliet's program possibly could be expanded and the Job Corps here could be assigned more students.